

Series: Profile of An Exile

“All Praise to God!”

1 Peter 1.3-5

Several days ago, actress Ashley Judd was in the Congo of South Africa. She and others were there to do research on endangered species and to raise awareness of the many needs of the Congolese people. Early one morning, while it was still dark, Judd and some researchers were making their way through the rain forest when she tripped, fell, and broke her leg in four places, causing excruciating pain.

It took five hours before someone could come and stabilize her leg—five hours of fidgeting and flinching in what Judd called “primal pain.” Once the leg was stabilized for transport, some of the Congolese carried her on a hammock out of the rain forest, which took about three hours. After that, they situated her on a motorbike, with someone holding her the entire six-hour drive over bumpy, muddy dirt roads.

Eventually, she reached a hospital, had emergency surgery, and spent time in ICU. Without the help of the Congolese people, she probably would have lost her leg, if not her life. In response to this whole ordeal, listen to these words Ashley Judd posted on Instagram: *“I wake up weeping in gratitude, deeply moved by each person who contributed something life giving and spirit saving during my grueling odyssey.”* With accompanying pictures, Judd named a few people who were the most helpful in her rescue mission and she praised them for their sacrifice and heroics.

“I wake up weeping in gratitude.” What an extraordinary statement. And while none of us have recently been rescued from the rain forest in Congo, those of us who know Christ as Savior *have been saved from the horrors of hell!* And while we may not wake up weeping every morning, *should we not wake up every single day IN GRATITUDE for what the Lord has done for us?*

Is the Lord not continuously worthy of our praise for his “heroic sacrifice”? He most certainly is! But sometimes, the circumstances of life can cause us to be distracted and forgetful. If we’re not careful, we can become a people who gripe rather than a people who praise. *And that’s the specific reason Peter writes our text in chapter one, verses 3-5.*

Peter is writing to believers who are submerged in trials, tribulations, and persecution, yet he exhorts them to praise God. To be grateful for what he’s done on their behalf in rescuing them from the pit of hell. Thus, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”*

From verses 3-5, let’s notice three reasons to praise God in conjunction with our salvation...

Praise God for salvation that springs from marvelous mercy (3a)

The wording of the NKJV is not as clear as I wish it was: God has ‘begotten us again.’ The ESV reads ‘caused us to be born again.’ And the NIV has ‘given us new birth.’

I really like the New Living Translation of verse 3... “All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again...”

The biblical teaching about being “born again” is found in only two places the Bible: John 3 and here in 1 Peter 1. The concept originated with Jesus’s nighttime meeting with Nicodemus. In John 3 this hyper-religious man came to Jesus at night to ask him about how to have eternal life. This man was a Pharisee and therefore very “religious.” He fasted two days a week, gave money to the poor, memorized Scripture, and attended the synagogue faithfully.

And yet Jesus told him that such religious activities would never get him into heaven. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You must be born again.” Understandably, Nicodemus didn’t understand and asked the obvious question, “Can a man go back into his mother’s womb?”

But Jesus wasn't talking about physical birth out of a literal womb; he was speaking about a spiritual birth by the Spirit of God when a person is transformed by the power of God and the Word of God (1 Peter 1.23) and he or she becomes a new person in Christ. Jesus then said that "unless a person is born again" by the Spirit, "he cannot enter the Kingdom of God."

You're either 'born again' or you aren't a Christian. If you're not 'born again,' you're not going to heaven. HAVE YOU BEEN BORN AGAIN? Are you sure?

When it comes to being "born again," I like the clarification John Blanchard provides: "*Christianity is not making a new start in life. It's receiving a new life to start with.*"

Here in our text, Peter writes that our being "born again," our being "saved" and on our way to heaven, is according to or because of God's "abundant/great mercy."

My guess is a lot more songs have been written about God's grace than God's mercy. However, we should be equally thankful for both! Because of God's amazing grace, we receive from him wonderful and eternal things that we do not deserve. Because of God's marvelous mercy, we do not receive all that we do deserve as wretched sinners.

Because of grace, we'll enjoy heaven forever.

Because of mercy, we'll avoid hell forever.

The need for mercy is a reminder that you are dead in your trespasses and sins. All of humanity is depraved. Everyone has a wicked and deceitful heart. And apart from the mercy of God, all of humanity is headed for just punishment in hell. BUT!! But according to Ephesians 2...

Ephesians 2:4–5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...

Titus 3:5 [God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy...

J. D. Greear: Religion says, "We are good, so God owes us." The gospel is, "We are evil, but God has been merciful, so we owe Him."

Chuck Colson was arrested and spent time in prison for his role in the Watergate scandal under President Nixon. Since his release, he's led a ministry called Prison Fellowship. In his book, *The Body*, he writes about Bob McAlister, who worked on the staff of the governor of South Carolina and also served as a Prison Fellowship Volunteer. Once when visiting prisoners on Death Row, Bob encountered a repulsive sight as he looked into the cell of Rusty Woomer. Bob wrote:

"Rusty, his face the color of chalk, was sitting on the floor—motionless. Dozens of roaches covered the wall and floor. But what froze my soul were the roaches crawling on the man—his lap, his shoulders—and such was his despair that he did not flick them off."

Bob began to visit Rusty and tell him about God's love and the mercy he could find in Christ. Eventually, Rusty's heart softened and finally through tears Rusty prayed this prayer: "Jesus, I've hurt a lot of people. Ain't no way that I deserve you to hear me, but I'm tired and I'm sick and I'm lonely. My mama's died and she's in heaven with you, and I never got to tell her bye. Please forgive me, Jesus, for everything I've done. I don't know much about you, but I'm willing to learn, and I thank you for listening to me."

The next time Bob McAlister visited Death Row he described a different scene: "I walked up to Rusty's cell. It was spotless. Gone were the dirt and roaches and porno magazines. The walls were scrubbed, the bed was made, the scent of disinfectant hung in the air. Rusty himself was smiling and enthusiastic. He said, 'I spent all weekend cleaning out my cell because I figured that's what Jesus wanted me to do.'" —Chuck Colson, *The Body*
Rusty was NOT saved by merit; he was saved by God's marvelous mercy!

Praise God for salvation that creates a continuous hope (3b)

According to God's great mercy, he has caused us to be born again "to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Do you know how the Bible describes unbelievers? According to Ephesians 2:12 they are described as "having no hope and without God in the world." What a contrast here with believers who have great hope and who know God personally through Christ!

Hope in the Bible is more than a vague wish like, "I hope we have pizza for lunch today." Or "I hope Duke beats Carolina on March 6." Or "I hope we get more than two days of sunshine this week."

Biblical hope is also more than positive thinking. It's far more than the little engine you read about in grammar school that chugged up a hill repeating, "I think I can, I think I can."

Hope—in the Bible—is defined as a certain expectation. And with it is a sense of anticipation. It's built on the same root word as 'faith,' and actually adds an element to faith. Faith says, "I believe," but hope takes it a step further in saying, "I believe *and expect*." Hope adds and emphasizes the element of eager, confident expectation. —Stanley Outlaw

According to the Scriptures and specifically verse 3 of our text, we have a hope that is alive and continuous because Jesus Christ is alive! Our hope is grounded in truth...the truth of Christ's resurrection! No wonder we joyfully sing, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow!"

To my knowledge, the following is a true story about a schoolteacher, and it takes place in a burn unit in a hospital in Philadelphia. A boy had been terribly burned in a house fire and although his physical wounds were healing, it was as if he had given up hope. His schoolteacher stopped by to see him; she wasn't prepared for the extent of his injuries, but she successfully hid her shock. Instead, she said, "Since you've missed class the last couple of months I wanted to stop by and help you learn your nouns and adverbs."

The next day the teacher returned again, and the nurse asked, "What did you do that boy yesterday?" The teacher thought she was in trouble and began to apologize. The nurse interrupted her and said, "No, he's MUCH better—it's as if he decided to live." When they entered the room, the boy's eyes lit up when he saw his teacher. The nurse asked him that was different. He said, "I thought I was going to die, and nobody would tell me the truth, but I figured that a teacher wouldn't come to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would she?" He suddenly went from no hope to having hope.

We're all dying. But because of Jesus, we have help for today, and hope for tomorrow, and hope for all eternity—and that's reason enough to rejoice!

Praise God for salvation that secures a glorious inheritance (4-5)

Because of God's mercy, verse 4 says we've been born again "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."

As it stands right now, if my mom were to pass away today, Rex, Susan and I would receive an inheritance... However, that inheritance is not guaranteed. A lot could happen between now and when mom does go to heaven. Her health could deteriorate and require spending tens of thousands on caregivers and/or a nursing home. Rex could become a villain and be taken out of the will! BUT, with our heavenly inheritance, those types of changes won't take place.

Our inheritance in Christ is *so vast and indescribable* that the only way Peter can describe it is by telling us some things that it is not: It is not perishable, it is not defiled, and it is not fading away. —Steven Cole

Our inheritance is "incorruptible//imperishable"

So many things in life aren't permanent. I have pants that claim to be permanent press, but I doubt they'll still have their crease in a hundred years. Ladies go the beauty salon and get a permanent on their hair. *Ladies how long does a permanent last?* Permanent markers aren't really permanent either. But our home in heaven is as *permanent* as God Himself. —David Dykes

It's impossible for our inheritance to experience decay. It will never come to ruin; it will never be destroyed.

The scattered believers that Peter is writing have had their lives adversely impacted by enemies of the gospel. For many of them, their homes and lands have been taken away from them. Many have been displaced and have no earthly security to speak of. Imagine how encouraging this portion of Scripture was to them! Their inheritance in Christ will never be taken away from them. –Steven Davey, adapted

Our inheritance is “undefiled”

The word translated *undefiled* describes things that are unstained or unpolluted; not spoiled. Everything in this fallen creation is stained and polluted by sin, and therefore it is all flawed. But our inheritance will never lose its luster and beauty. It will never become stained or filthy.

The word “undefiled” also speaks of a life without the stain of sin or crime or fear. Imagine a life without locks or alarms. Keys are no longer necessary. Everyone enjoys life without fear. There are no prisons in heaven. No need of police. No radar guns either. ☺ –David Helm, adapted

Our inheritance “does not fade away”

Our heavenly abode will never fade in beauty. It will not lose its glory or its freshness. The flowers will never wilt, and the colors will never lose their vibrancy. “When we’ve been there, ten thousand/million years,” the beauty and vibrancy of heaven will still be pristine and extraordinary! Our inheritance will never lose its magnificence.

Our inheritance is “reserved in heaven”

The verse concludes with the promise that the inheritance is “reserved/kept in heaven for you.” That is, God is the one who reserves the inheritance for believers. Peter emphasized in the strongest possible terms the security and certainty of the reward awaiting believers. –Thomas Schreiner

Chuck Swindoll wrote in his commentary on this text that when you arrive, some celestial receptionist won't look at you and say, “Now, what was your last name again? Can I see your credit card just one more time? No, after your long journey through life, the living God will welcome you home without one inch of red tape. Your reservation will never get lost!”

Peter goes on to say in verse 5 that believers “are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation.”

The text does not merely say that believers are protected by God to receive salvation. Peter added that believers are protected “*through faith*.” Believers must exercise ongoing faith to receive final salvation. *Faith here is “continuing trust.” Peter did not conceive of faith as a single isolated act; genuine faith persists until the day of redemption.*

There is no final salvation apart from continued faith, and thus faith *is a condition* for obtaining the eschatological inheritance. It is imperative to understand that God's protection cannot be kept in a separate compartment from our believing. –Thomas Schreiner

Once again, we encounter the dovetailing of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. God promises protection, but believers must exercise faith to receive final salvation.

Through faith, the power of God prevents Satan from plucking you out of the Father's hand. Through faith, the power of God prevents the demons of hell from robbing you of your salvation. Through faith, the power of God keeps your soul secure through the trials and tribulations of life.

The “*salvation*” spoken of in verse 5 is not talking about the beginning of our salvation. *This speaks of our future, full and final salvation enjoyed in our glorified bodies and completely free from pain, sorrow, crying and dying!* This will take place after the Second Coming of Christ, after the judgment, and it will be enjoyed by believers in the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21:1-27)!

So, our text is all about God's mercy and power to save our souls. It's all about us as believers having hope beyond the grave and an inheritance that will last for all eternity. How appropriate then, that we used to sing the Doxology at the beginning of every single chapel service when I was in Bible College. And how appropriate to sing it any and every time we do sing it...

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Praise him for mercy! Praise him for hope! Praise him for our inheritance! **Yes, ALL praise to God!**